

Hiring Security Services

Hiring a Private Patrol, Alarm, or Private Investigation Service

Private Patrol Operators

Private patrol companies employ security guards and dispatch them to protect persons or property or to prevent theft. The company must be licensed by the Department of Consumer Affairs, and the security guards must be registered with the Department. Licensing and registration involve criminal history background checks through the Department of Justice. The *company* may contract with you, but an individual security guard may not, unless he or she is *also* licensed as a private patrol operator.

Alarm Companies

Alarm companies sell alarms on the consumer's premises; install, service, and monitor alarms; and respond to alarm activations. These companies must be licensed by the Department of Consumer Affairs. (Retail stores may sell alarm systems *only at the store*, and they may not perform any alarm company functions. Retail stores are not licensed by the Department.) Alarm company operators, managers, and agents must pass criminal history background checks through the Department of Justice. An alarm company may hire *another* company to monitor alarms. When you hire an alarm company, make sure that your contract *specifically states* whether the alarm company or a licensed monitoring service will be doing the monitoring.

Private Investigators

Private investigators may investigate crimes, individuals, the cause of fires, losses, accidents, damage, or injury; search for lost or stolen property; and obtain evidence for use in court. They may protect persons *only* if such services are incidental to an investigation; they may **not** protect property. Private investigators must be licensed by the Department of Consumer Affairs and pass a criminal history background check through the Department of Justice.

Firearms Permits

Private patrol, alarm, and private investigation licensees may **not** carry weapons unless they have a firearms qualification card issued by the Department. They may not carry *concealed* weapons unless they have a permit from local law enforcement *and* a firearms permit from the Department of Consumer Affairs.

*Your security depends
on these professionals.
Be sure to check the
company's license and
record with the
Department of
Consumer Affairs.*

Choosing a Company

Private patrol services, alarm companies, and private investigators are listed in the yellow pages of your telephone directory. Before you choose one, do the following:

- Get the recommendations of friends.
- Call 1-800-952-5210 to find out if the business or individual has a current license issued by the Department of Consumer Affairs and if any complaints are on file.
- Ask your local district attorney's office or Better Business Bureau about the company.
- Compare the prices and services of different companies.

Before You Sign

It is always a good idea—and in some cases it is required by law—to have a written contract. Before signing a contract, be sure:

- To read it carefully. Make sure you understand all of it. If you don't like what you see, don't sign. If you don't understand it, take it home overnight. Don't allow yourself to be rushed into signing. Check it over with a friend or your attorney if you are unsure.
- To ask the company to cross out words you don't like and add words you believe should be there.
- To insist that it include all oral promises and written agreements between you and the company.

Canceling a Contract

If you change your mind about a private patrol, private investigation, or alarm service you have contracted for *at your home*, you have three business days to cancel the contract. (The three-day period does not apply if you purchase the service at the company office or location other than your home.) Begin counting on the day after you sign the contract. You must cancel in writing. Hand carry the cancellation letter to the company, or mail it certified mail, return receipt requested. (Be sure to keep a copy for your records.) The company must refund your deposit within ten days of receiving your cancellation, unless the contract states another time period.

Spanish-Language Contracts

If the contract negotiation is in Spanish, the company is required to give you a Spanish translation of the contract.

For Help

If you have problems regarding a contract with a private patrol service, alarm company, or private investigator, contact a private attorney or your local Legal Aid Office (listed in the phone directory white pages).